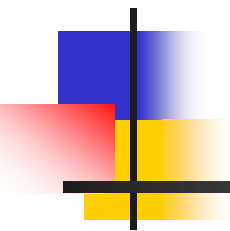


# Helping Affected Children of Returning Veterans Across Systems



---

*What and Who do they need pre- and  
post- deployment*

Sis Wenger

President and CEO

National Association for Children of Alcoholics





# Why Worry about COAs?

---

- They are our children, and so many of them are doubly impacted – by losses associated with alcohol or drug problems and losses associated with deployment.
- Their problems create widespread social disarray, impair learning and impede healthy development.
- They need help and they **can** be helped.
- Return to civilian life or returning from the war goes better when the whole family is helped.



# Addiction in the Family Affects Everyone

---

Family members develop unhealthy ways of communicating with each other and coping with the addiction.

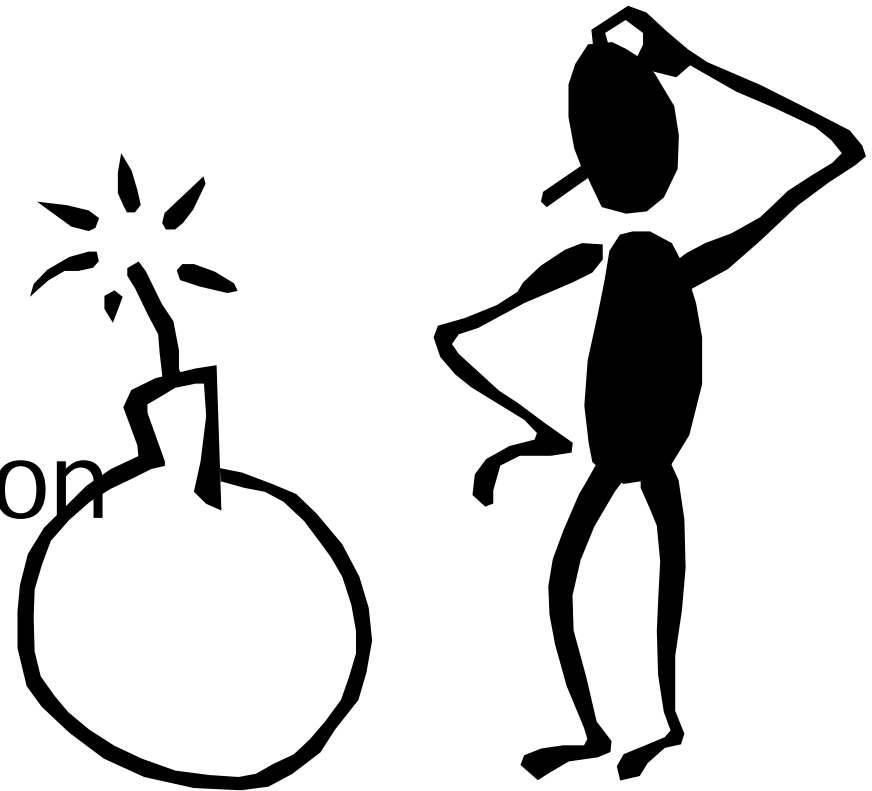
**Rules in addicted families:**

- **Don't talk!**
- **Don't' trust!**
- **Don't feel!**

***Programs for children of affected veterans  
need to **Help Break the Rules!!*****

# Families with Addicted Parents Have Defenses Hurtful to Kids

- Denial
- Minimizing
- Projection
- Rationalization

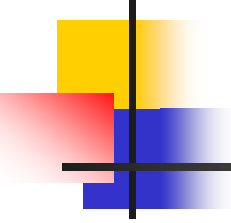




# How Are They Hurt?

---

- Emotional abuse by both parents and addicted sibling
- Neglect and physical injury
- Lack of discipline, structure
- Social isolation and lack of normal “fun”
- Permissive or over-reactive attitudes toward alcohol & drug use
- Lack of positive role models



# What Messages Should the Children Hear?

---

- You're not alone.
- You deserve help, and there are safe people who can help.
- It's OK to feel your feelings.
- Treatment helps, and recovery happens.
- It's not your fault.
- Addiction is a health problem.
- It's important to talk.
- You can live a good life, even if your parent continues to drink.



# Message Delivery Systems

---

*When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change...* Don Coyhis, Mohican

- **Military Health Care Facilities**
- **Addiction and Mental Health Treatment Programs**
- **Faith Communities and Chaplains**
- **Courts**
- **Community Coalitions**
- **Schools**
- **Workplace Programs**



# COA Support Groups

---

- Let them know they are not alone.
- Validate their perceptions and interpretations.
- Help them gain some perspective.
- Absolve them of blame.
- Help them separate parent from parental behavior.
- Offer hope, self-care skills and help to cope.
- Provide a safe outlet for anger.
- Explain risks of behavior, and how to identify safe people in their lives.
- Help build self-esteem.





# SAMHSA's Children's Program Kit

---



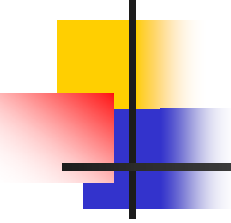
- Launched – June, 2003
- Goals:
  - To prevent addiction and mental health problems in the highest risk population – youth living in families with addiction – and to increase their capacity for resilience
  - To lessen the confusion and provide support for children of addicted parents – both those in treatment and those not receiving recovery services
  - To enhance the recovery outcomes of parents in treatment



# Structure of the Kit's Curriculum Activities

---

- Three levels:  
Grades 1-5, 6-8, 9-12
- Five activity options in each topic area
- 47 separate program activities
- Six topic areas
  - Addiction
  - Feelings
  - Problem solving
  - Treatment & recovery
  - Safe people
  - Coping



# Group Work is the Preferred Strategy Because:

---

- Kids learn they are not alone.
- Group work increases the likelihood of breaking denial and reducing the fear.
- Group work provides safety and protection.
- Kids experience healthy social interactions.
- Group work builds trust in social situations.
- Group work provides opportunities for group validation.
- Group work allows kids to try out new approaches to old problems.

# Components of the Children's Program Kit

---



- Program manual
- Materials for staff in-service programs
- Full curriculum of educational activities
- Announcement posters
- Four films (videos or DVDs)



# The Program Manual Includes:

---

- Tools for therapists of parent clients
- Letters to parents
- Hand-outs for parents
- Resource list
- Evaluation tools
- Staff in-service program materials
- Program start-up instructions



# Videos

---

- For staff and community presentations
  - *End Broken Promises, Mend Broken Hearts*
- For children
  - *You're Not Alone*
  - *Pepper*
  - *Michael's Journey*



# *End Broken Promises, Mend Broken Hearts*

---

**This film provides:**

- **Information about educational support groups.**
- **Messages from children and parents who have benefited from support groups.**
- **Messages from prevention, treatment, and school professionals who provide educational support groups for children of parents in treatment.**



# *You're Not Alone*

---

- Teaches the "Seven Cs"
  - I didn't CAUSE it.
  - I can't CURE it.
  - I can't CONTROL it.
  - I can help take CARE of myself by
    - COMMUNICATING my feelings,
    - Making healthy CHOICES, and by
    - CELEBRATING myself.





# Summary

---



## **Providing support groups using the Children's Program Kit:**

- **can help ensure that COAs and other at risk children are supported in a timely manner**
- **is an adaptable set of tools for use in treatment programs, schools, and community youth programs**
- **can be easily adapted for faith settings in the community and on military bases.**



# Contact Us:

---



**National Association for Children of  
Alcoholics**

**11426 Rockville Pike, Suite 301**

**Rockville, Maryland 20852**

**1-888-55-4COAS**

**[www.nacoa.org](http://www.nacoa.org)**

**e-mail: [nacoa@nacoa.org](mailto:nacoa@nacoa.org)**